



**INDOCHINA  
IN THE YEAR OF  
THE MONKEY - 1968**







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## **Song of the Vietnam Vets**

It was many years ago, in that hell called Vietnam,  
Where we all lost so many gallant friends,  
Oh, it seems not long ago with the comrades we all know—  
And you'll never see the likes of them again.

You cursed the ones who died and you spit on those who lived,  
Then you slipped across the border to the north,  
They were welcome to you then, for our comrades, they were men,  
And you'll never, ever know what Freedom's worth.

Sure, we had our tickets out, we could have ducked like you,  
But we had something that we still call pride.  
We'd rather die than crawl, so when they stand you by that wall—  
Try and tell them you were on the progressive side!

We never lost a battle, but Congress lost that bloody war,  
While at home, the cowards, they were praised.  
Ten million Asians died since we had to leave their side,  
And there's hardly been a word of protest raised.

So when they come for you, and you look around for help,  
And wonder where in hell are all the men,  
Just ask for Hanoi Jane, she'll be happy to explain—  
For you'll never see the likes of us again.

It was many years ago, in that hell called Vietnam,  
Where we all lost so many gallant friends,  
Oh, it seems not long ago, but brother, don't you know,  
They will never see the likes of us again.

**Robert A Hall**

From: *Old Jarhead Poems: The Heart of a Marine*



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## **Introduction: Indochina in the Year of the Monkey**

**Strategy.** In 1967 strategic disputes between Hanoi's two allies, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, primarily involved the issues of conventional war versus guerrilla war and protracted fight-talk negotiations versus increased conventional combat. The new strategy of Le Duan, First Secretary of the Politburo of the ruling Lao Dong Party in Hanoi, combined a kind of Blitzkrieg conventional war with a nationwide popular uprising. He silenced his Politburo critics, both real and suspected, with a Stalinist reign of terror in North Vietnam.

At the end of January, Le Duan initiated the first of three phases of the 1968 Tet offensive. Six cities, thirty-six provincial capitals, and sixty-four district capitals were simultaneously attacked by Viet Cong forces (officially the National Liberation Front, NLF). The VC were the southern subordinates of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), both of which were controlled by the Hanoi Politburo. In late January, while U.S. "peace" groups were demanding an unconditional halt to the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, large NVA units were invading South Vietnam.

Despite U.S. military intelligence in Vietnam that warned of the 1968 Tet Offensive, it was a stunning surprise to the U.S. media and civilian population. The NFL called for a nationwide popular uprising against the government of South Vietnam, but the urban populations turned against the VC and NVA forces because of their appalling acts of mass terrorism in Hue and other cities.

A second and third wave of weaker attacks in May and August were also VC tactical failures. In 1968 the NVA and VC may have suffered a total of 500,000 casualties, yet President Johnson and the majority of the U.S. media and Congress thought the U.S. forces and South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces had been strategically defeated merely because those battles were fought.

The nationwide tactical victories of the anti-Communist forces were ignored, and the non-factual interpretation of the Tet battles by the militarily ignorant and politically adversarial media and leftist antiwar groups created a psychological victory for the Communist forces in America despite all their combat losses in Vietnam. President Johnson failed to refute that interpretation, and most of the U.S. media refused to correct it after the contradictory military facts were known.

**Communist Massacres.** The battle for Hue lasted nearly a month, until the U.S. and ARVN troops killed or expelled the last NVA and VC forces. In Hue the Communists executed at least 3,000 civilians and

buried them, both dead and alive, in multiple shallow graves, some of which were not discovered until two years later. One expert on the subject, Douglas Pike, estimated the actual Communist slaughter of unarmed civilian victims in Hue as closer to 5,800.

**Peace Movement.** The National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, a coalition of radical leftist “peace” groups, organized riots at the 1968 Democrat convention in Chicago. Agents of the North Vietnamese Politburo met with U.S. “peace” group leaders to coordinate their antiwar demonstrations and focus them on Communist propaganda themes.

**Media.** The U.S. media reported the false claims of U.S. war crimes, such as using outlawed chemical weapons and targeting women, children, schools, and hospitals, while ignoring the mass Communist terrorism and atrocities in Hue and other cities.

**South Vietnam.** After the disastrous VC losses in the Tet battles, the NVA forces retreated from much of the South Vietnamese territory they had temporarily occupied. The fighting of 1968 strengthened the Saigon government and stimulated a surge of patriotic volunteers in the ARVN.

**Public Opinion.** U.S. public opinion varied with media reports of U.S. battlefield results and the perceived resolve of U.S. leaders to win the war. Some forty percent of U.S. voters wanted a stronger conventional war strategy against North Vietnam, where the war originated and was controlled, not more of Johnson’s limited war, counterinsurgency strategy in South Vietnam.

At the end of March, Johnson responded to criticisms of his policy in Vietnam by unilaterally restricting U.S. bombing of North Vietnam to an area on its southern border and naively calling again for negotiations with the North Vietnamese to end the war on mutually acceptable terms.

**Chicago.** After months of consultations with the North Vietnamese, Tom Hayden, David Dellinger, and Reggie Davis devised a plan for a “National Mobilization Against the War in Vietnam” to disrupt the Democrat Party Convention in August in Chicago. Most U.S. voters blamed the ensuing riots on the leftist protesters, not on the Chicago police. Most U.S. public opinion favored the Republican “law and order” campaign of Richard Nixon against the Democrat candidate, Herbert Humphrey, Johnson’s Vice President.